

(Washington, DC)— Congresswoman Gwen Moore (D-Wisc.), Vice Chair of the Congressional Women's Caucus, met with Amnesty International's Secretary General, Irene Zubaida Khan, and other Women's Caucus members this morning to discuss international efforts to combat violence against women.

The meeting came on the heels of a U.S. House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight hearing yesterday, at which Members questioned actress Nicole Kidman, U.N. Development Fund for Women Goodwill Ambassador, on subjects related to the upcoming reauthorization of the International Violence Against Women Act. The Honorable Melanne Verwee, Ambassador-At-Large for the Office of Global Women's Issues at the Department of State, was also questioned yesterday.

Much of these discussions centered on how the status of women in any country is an indicator of the progress of that society at-large. In places where women face societal, political and economic oppression, that society as a whole consequently tends to suffer conditions of social, political and economic deprivation and hardship. These conditions create a breeding ground for terror and extremism, and are therefore a direct threat to America's national security interests.

One in three women worldwide face gender-based violence, which includes rape, genital mutilation, honor killings, forced labor or prostitution. In 102 countries, there are no specific legal provisions prohibiting domestic violence. Less than half of 191 countries reviewed by a 2006 United Nations report have legislation prohibiting human trafficking.

"In order to reduce the breeding grounds for terror, one of the things we have to do is raise women up," Congresswoman Moore said. "The instability of a country – and a country's ability to breed extremists – is often directly related to the rights of women in that country."

"We are all well aware of the devastating toll violence takes on women and families. But when we are speaking about violence against women in an international sense, we are talking about a national security issue. The status of women across the world who are subjected to violence in their own countries is a good indicator of the progress, or lack thereof, in the societies they call home. If we can find a way to free women around the world from the economic, social, and political oppression that so many of them experience day after day– and help them to grow and prosper—it can only benefit the countries in which they reside.

“Women are the linchpins of stable community life around the world, so in helping to empower them, we will be helping to alleviate the poverty and terrible chaotic conditions that allow extremism, violence, and terrorism to take root in the first place. We have a great deal at stake in the struggle to abet violence against women.”

The International Violence Against Women Act coordinates U.S. efforts – including those of the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) – as well as those efforts of private organizations and nonprofit agencies to target and put an end to violence against women.

The bill would establish the Office of Global Women’s Initiatives within the Office of the Secretary of State to coordinate all U.S. government efforts regarding international women’s issues. It would also provide money to train foreign military and police forces on how to prevent violence against women.

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